



Western Australian Association
for Mental Health



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Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc

*Ways to make
a difference*



Western Australian Network of
Alcohol & other Drug Agencies

Report: WA Justice System – Expensive & Ineffective

“Western Australians are spending more than ever on prisons and corrective services, and yet our jails are overcrowded and re-offending rates continue to rise,” said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS today.

“The election commitments of the major parties; promising further mandatory detention and minimum sentencing laws and the ‘tough on crime’ agenda are leading WA in the wrong direction. There is no evidence that this approach reduces crime or restores law abiding behaviour in people with complex needs in our justice system.”

Ms Cattalini was speaking at the launch of the joint report *Justice and Community Safety in WA: Efficient investment in effective outcomes*, produced by WA’s peak mental health, drug and alcohol and community service organisations.

Western Australian incarceration and re-offending rates are skyrocketing – our prison population has grown 40% in the last six years, juveniles in custody have risen 56% and at the same time our recidivism rate rose to 44%. Despite increased spending, WA also has the most overcrowded prisons in the nation. The Corrective Services budget increased 75% over the last 6 years to \$760m per year – not including the additional \$830m to build new and expanded prisons or the additional running costs.

Rod Astbury, Executive Director of WAAMH, drew attention to alarmingly high rates of existing and unresolved mental health problems in our prison population.

“Research indicates that 85% of court attendees have had contact at some previous stage with mental health services” while around 7% of the prison population have psychosis and 20% have depressive disorders,” he said.

“Prison mental health programs are chronically under-resourced and under-staffed, so that treatment is often only available for those at crisis point ... and few ex-prisoners are likely to receive any medical or mental health follow up once they have been released.”

“The lack of effective services, follow-up and support is a major and pressing issue for community safety,” said Mr Astbury.

Jill Rundle, CEO of WANADA, pointed to significantly high rates of alcohol and other drug problems amongst people involved in the corrections system - with research indicating 80% of WA prisoners have a history of regular illicit drug use and 50% high levels of drug dependence.

“Assessment of alcohol and drug problems is not routinely undertaken on entry into prison and the provision of treatment programs by the Department of Corrective Services is inadequate,” she said.

“A recent public opinion poll undertaken by WANADA showed 90% community support for prisoners receiving alcohol and other drug treatment and education. Without routine assessment services cannot be tailored for best effect.”

“More resources are needed to support a comprehensive approach for community on alcohol and other drug issues. We need to reduce harmful use in the first place, prevent alcohol and other drug use impacting on criminal behaviour, and effectively treat alcohol and other drug problems in prisons. Then we need to ensure post-release pathways programs are available to support the transition back into the community and reduce further criminal activity.”

“The evidence is clear that mandatory sentencing is ineffective and extremely expensive. Investment in rehabilitation programs is both cheaper and more effective,” said Ms Cattalini.

“We need to embrace a justice reinvestment model to gradually reduce the investment in prisons and increase resources for effective, evidence-based prevention and early intervention strategies.”

“We are calling on all parties to ensure that the next WA Government commits to a significant increase in funding for community-based early intervention and rehabilitation services,” concluded Ms Cattalini.

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